

From: mark.stout@L-3com.com@inetgw
To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Microsoft Settlement

Hail!

I am an engineer supporting a US Air Force project. Our group uses MS-DOS on a system for the Air Force and Windows on our main server and desktops. One print server runs Linux and my own desktop dual-boots Windows and Linux.

It is my understanding that the Government is considering a settlement that would compel Microsoft to open it's application interfaces to commercial competitors. Great as it sounds, this leaves out two important entities, the US Government and non-commercial competitors.

If the government, or a hospital, requires software that can be reviewed by a large group to ensure that it is defect-free, such as that protecting nuclear materials or keeping people alive, that should be a possibility available to us.

The current plausible threats to Microsoft are Linux and BSD. The Government already contributes to these; most of the network drivers were written by a NASA employee. The government already uses Linux and BSD in many places where Windows is cost prohibitive and the programmers need access to the source code. This access is a very important component.

Presumably, Microsoft's source code is going to be protected as a trade secret. It's widely known that little of it was ever Microsoft's, so they need to keep it secret to stay out of jail. Anyhow, the application interfaces have to be open in order for anybody to write a program that communicates with Microsoft's products. Releasing them to a commercial competitor might've been useful 20 years ago, but today, these have to be available to the U.S. Government and the the Open Source (Linux, BSD) community.

The course before us now is a straight, short path to dictatorship. Already, the licenses for Microsoft Frontpage and Microsoft Internet Information Server (commonly IIS) forbid thier use in disparaging Microsoft. If the alternatives to these are lost, as this settlement offers, Bill Gates could run for president and be unopposed; it would be illegal to suggest that another person could better fill that position. Once in place, any suggestions that Mr. Gates had about changing the way laws are made, interpreted and enforced would immediately become law; it would be illegal to suggest that Democracy is better than dictatorship.

Microsoft's arguments that they had to shut down Netscape, IBM, Borland, etc. as a matter of survival are reminiscent of Hitler's 1924 arguments that if he didn't start eliminating Jews he'd have to compete with them for food, clothing and shelter.

Microsoft's arguments that they can't work within any consent decree with the government because they need freedom to innovate ignore the fact that Microsoft's last innovation was to offer the best implementation of BASIC for the CP/M operating system in the late seventies. Everything else that Microsoft has sold since then was invented outside of Microsoft,

usually by a company with less than fifty employees. I could agree to Microsoft being free with it's innovations; they can make and sell BASIC interpreters for other people's operating systems forever; I won't begrudge them a nickel that they earned legitimately.

Good luck,

-Mark